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ABSTRACT

This opinion paper concentrates on changes in instruction and educational philosophy necessary if urban schools are to become more effective. Learning principles for these schools should be the following: (1) teachers should assist students in developing and maintaining interest; (2) learning experiences should be meaningful; (3) students must experience challenge and success; (4) there must be a purpose to the learning; and (5) there must be balance among cognitive, affective, and psychomotor objectives. The philosophical schools of thought which can provide direction for urban schools are the following: (1) experimentalism with many problem solving exercises; (2) idealism in which the mental achievements and ideas of the students dominate; (3) realism or knowing the world as it truly exists; and (4) existentialism stressing the need for the students learning to choose and select on an individual basis. (VM)

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THE URBAN SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Students in urban schools need to achieve in an optimal manner. Teachers and administrators need to develop a psychology of learning which assists each student to learn as much as possible. There are selected principles of learning when followed by teachers should guide urban students to attain as much as possible.

Principles of Learning and the Urban School

First of all, teachers should assist students to develop and/or maintain interest in ongoing lessons and units. All other things being equal, students learn more when interested, as compared to a lack of interest. Each teacher needs to develop strategies of teaching which capture learner interest in the curriculum. Urban school students differ from each other in terms of which activities generate interest.

To secure student interest, it behooves the urban school teacher to utilize a variety of kinds of learning opportunities. Reading materials (textbooks, library books, and encyclopedias, among other printed media), as well as audio-visual aids (laser video disks, video tapes, slides, filmstrips, and films) should be used as learning activities so that urban students attain objectives. The media selected as a learning opportunity must capture the interests of the urban school student.

Secondly, learners in urban schools need to attach meaning to ongoing learning experiences. If these students understand what has been taught, meaning in ongoing lessons and units is in evidence. That which has meaning to a student relates directly to his/her past experiences. Content taught should come within the experiences of urban

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students so that relationships of new subject matter acquired with that previously taught is in evidence. Meaningful experiences, not rote learning of new subject matter, must be in the offing for the urban student.

Thirdly, the urban school student needs to experience success in learning. New subject matter needs to be learned by each student. And yet, the subject matter is attainable. If the content in ongoing lessons and units is too easy, boredom and a lack of challenge may be in evidence. Toward the other end of the continuum, if the content to be learned is excessively complex, failure to achieve may well be an end result.

Fourthly, purpose in learning is highly important. If an urban learner perceives purpose, reasons for learning and achieving are in evidence. Purpose may be acquired by students in a deductive manner. The teacher explaining briefly to students the value(s) inherent in learning new subject matter makes content more palitable for acquisition. In addition to deductive means of assisting students to perceive purpose in learning, inductive procedures may also be utilized. Through induction, the teacher raises questions of learners to assist the latter through discovery to perceive the importance of attaining vital facts, concepts, and generalizations.

Fifthly, urban students need to experience balance among objectives. Thus, cognitive, affective, and psychomotor objectives need to be emphasized in ongoing lessons an units. One category of objectives is not adequate of the three. Cognitive objectives (creative and critical thinking, problem solving, as well as acquiring

vitgal facts, concepts, and generalizations) are salient for learner achievement. School and society emphasize the importance of thinking skills to achieve optimally as fully functioning individuals. Affective ends advocate the importance of students having positive attitudes toward the self and toward others. Only then can cognitive objectives be achieved by students in an effective manner. Good attitudes also assist students to do well in the psychomotor dimension. Psychomotor growth emphasizes refined use of the gross and fine muscles, as well as attaining more optimally in manual dexterity. Urban students need to achieve well in cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domain objectives.

Utilizing principles of learning from research results in educational psychology should guide the teacher to help each student to achieve as much as possible.

The Philosophy of Education

Diverse philosophical schools of thought can do much to provide direction to urban teachers in selecting objectives, learning opportunities, and appraisal procedures.

Experimentalism, as one philosophy, emphasizes teachers guiding students in problem solving experiences. These problems should be life-like and real. What exists in society can provide excellent experiences in problem solving for students. With interest in problems selected, students should put forth effort in learning. Effort and interest become one and not separate entities.

Flexible, not absolute, steps of problem solving can be emphasized in ongoing lessons and units. These steps may include

1. selecting a problem from among alternatives.

2. gathering data from diverse reference sources to secure tentative solutions or answers.

3. developing a hypothesis directly covering the gathered data or information.

4. testing the hypothesis in a realistic, not artificial, situation.

5. revising the hypothesis, if evidence warrants.

Urban school students need to experience problem solving in the curriculum. Learners will realize that in school and in society, problems are identified and attempted solutions made.

Idealism, as a second philosophy for the urban teacher to emphasize, advocates students achieving well in an idea centered curriculum. Intellectual development becomes salient in idealism. The mind is real and mental achievement of students needs to predominate in school.

The learning of subject matter is significant in idealism. Vital concepts and generalizations need to be selected by the teacher for student achievement. Textbooks, workbooks, and other abstract reference materials should provide content for student acquisition. The teacher needs to be a true academic for students to be aided to achieve well. He/she serves as a model to help learners achieve well academically and intellectually. Abstract learning activities for students are prized more so than the concrete and the semi-concrete. However, concrete and semi-concrete activities should be brought into the curriculum as they guide students to learn more significant subject matter.

Urban school students need to achieve salient subject matter content and develop optimally in intellectual achievement.

Realism, as a third philosophy, emphasizes that one can know the real world as it truly is or exists. One then does not merely experience the real world as experimentalists emphasize, nor does the person only receive ideas pertaining to the actual natural and social world as idealistic believe. Rather, the carefully selected behaviorally stated objectives chosen by the urban teacher, among other individuals, and implemented in teaching-learning situations assist students to attain what is precise and measurable. The total number of objectives attained by students represents the scope of the curriculum. Sequence represents the order in which learners attain the objectives in the curriculum. Urban students need guidance to achieve as many specific objectives as individual abilities permit.

Existentialism, as a fourth philosophy, stresses students learning to choose and select on an individual basis. Decision-making becomes the number on goal. Life demands that to be human, each person must choose from among alternatives. If others make decisions for the self, one no longer is human, according to existentialism. The authentic self then makes decisions. Existentialists believe that life is ridiculous and absurd. However, within this environment, the human being chooses and selects, from among alternative options.

Urban students must have ample opportunities to make authentic selections. Among other methods of teaching, the following represent existentialist thinking:

1. a learning center approach. Here, students may sequentially select tasks to complete. There are adequate tasks so that each student may omit those not deemed beneficial. Time on task is highly important. An adequate number of tasks should deal with the human dilemma and condition. Values clarification then becomes important.
2. teacher-student planning of objectives, learning activities, and appraisal procedures. Heavy student input into curriculum development is important from an existentialist point of view.
3. contract systems. Each student plans learning opportunities with the teacher. These learning opportunities are placed on the contract. The student is heavily involved in terms of determining what he/she wishes to learn. The due date is written on the contract with attached student and teacher signature.

The learning centers approach, student-teacher planning of the curriculum, and the contract system emphasize a psychological, not logical organization of learning activities. Sequence resides within the student. Students order or sequence their very own experiences, resulting in a psychological curriculum.

Urban students need to be actively involved in ongoing lessons and units. Decision-making from among alternatives is the heart of the human condition.

In Closing

Urban students need to experience

1. interesting activities in the curriculum.

2. meaning in ongoing lessons and units.

3. success in attaining objectives in the school setting.

4. purpose or reasons for learning.

5. cognitive, affective, and psychomotor goals in teaching-learning situations. Attaining one category of goals is not adequate. Balance among objectives needs to be stressed.

Pertaining to the philosophy of education, students in urban schools need to

1. become proficient problem solvers in school and in society.
2. achieve dynamic, vital subject matter learnings in an idea centered curriculum.
3. attain relevant, not trivial, specific objectives in ongoing lessons and units.
4. develop proficiency in the decision making area.